L.Layard E-5 (1914-1915) 1942 OO12 Malekula OO12

constructed fences are made on the Small Islands. The daily exodus of canoes to the mainland, after the leisurely taking of the morning meal and when the sun is already high in the sky, is one of the most delightful sights in the whole archipelago. The return takes place during the late afternoon, when each canoe comes back separately, laden with yams[1] wrapped in leafy parcels, bunches of bananas, bread-fruit and other delicacies with which to prepare the evening meal, or towards the festive season, with larger quantities of yams to store on special yam-tables raised above the ground and roofed so that the accumulated food-stuffs may be kept dry.

Since few years pass without some small war breaking out between the various communities inhabiting these islands, it might be thought that their island position would fit them admirably to serve as small fortresses with the sea acting as a surrounding moat. But this is only partially the case, since, as we shall see in the chapter on warfare, the war-making unit is never the island, wars being usually internecine, founded on a standing enmity between two Sides of the same island, and when alliances take place these are with the corresponding Sides of other islands or with certain villages of the adjacent mainland, among all of whom the same dual organisation exists. These wars, however, rarely result in much bloodshed, and are but one aspect of the creative rivalry between otherwise friendly groups on which, as will be seen later, the social organisation of these islands is based.

APPROACH FROM THE SOUTH

If now we approach these islands from the south, whence the patrilineal influence has come and whence also most white men approach them after entering the archipelago at the port of call in the island of Fate some 100 miles to the south, our first introduction to the natural forces that have pushed up the North Central New Hebrides from the ocean bed is the active volcano of Lopevi rising sheer out of the water. Passing to the left of this, the next impressive sight is the large island of Ambrim, crowned by an active crater with innumerable small fissures around it, whence comes the volcanic dust that, mixing with the coral sand and humus of the Small Islands forty miles to the north-west, gives their dancing-grounds the peculiar surface that renders them so soft and firm for dancing, and at the same time is heavy enough not to rise. From the same source come also the currents that sweep in a north-westerly direction up the Malekulan coast, causing certain beaches to have a fine grey sand called "black sand" while others that

[1] Taro, the staple diet on Oba, is not grown here, for lack of terracing and irrigation, but a species, called by the name of *na-mbet*, has recently been introduced as food for pigs.